FIVE

Prevention of femicide

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Introduction

When referring to 'prevention of femicide', we refer to actions at the individual, family, and social and community levels that can reduce the likelihood of women being killed because of their gender. Strategies for prevention of femicide differ depending on the definition of femicide and the cases to which we refer. For example, prevention of femicide in intimate partner relationships is different from prevention of the killing of trafficked women, or girls being subjugated and killed. These distinct femicides are set in different contexts, involve different risk factors and therefore require different prevention strategies. However, what all femicides share is a single motivation: femicide, according to the feminist approach, and the one that enables us to explain its prevalence worldwide, is the killing of women because they are women, regardless of whether it is perpetrated by the victim's partner, ex-partner or a non-partner. The killing of women constitutes an extreme exercise of power against them; it is perpetrated to establish control (Radford and Russell, 1992).

This masculine, misogynist perspective on gender also increases the perception that violence is an acceptable way of managing disputes, conflicts and problems. Within femicides, it is possible to identify recurrent patterns: namely, homicide occurring as an ultimate means to degrade, silence and subjugate women.

Femicide prevention efforts require both research and intervention. They include combating a culture based on relationships in which men have dominance over women, and not only those actions immediately preceding the killing. In fact, prevention can be set at different levels, depending on the level of risk factor it focuses on. Causes of femicide are multilevel: employing an ecological approach, risk factors can be identified at the individual, interpersonal and community levels. Back in 1998, Heise described how the ecological framework is the most exhaustive to explain violence against women, as it looks not only at which risk factors are relevant but at how they interact in a dynamic way. As Heise explains, 'besides serving as a framework for research, an ecological approach provides a way to better understand differences among abusers' (Heise, 1988: 284). Risk factors at the *individual level* may be related to the perpetrator's personality, abuse of alcohol and/ or drugs, childhood abuse, a history of violence, or masculine honour-based beliefs (Baldry and Pagliaro, 2014). At the *interpersonal level*, factors include, among others, the type and status of the relationship between victim and perpetrator, and family influences. At the *community level*, risk factors include the surrounding culture and its predominant beliefs about violence, previous prevention campaigns and legal definitions.

Prevention of femicide is therefore a complex issue, as ideally all these levels should be addressed. In this chapter, we will focus on some aspects of prevention of femicide in order to highlight a number of avenues for possible action, including femicide fatality reviews, and risk assessment to identify relevant and critical risk and vulnerability factors. In addition, we will address primary prevention as an essential step for challenging patriarchal culture,

and developing research, activism and intervention (Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate, 2016).

Femicide fatality reviews

Fatality reviews in cases of femicide are a process whereby a homicide is analysed with the aim of identifying all potential factors that might explain its occurrence and locating any possible failure in the system. The intention is not to hold anyone other than the perpetrator responsible but, rather, to offer recommendations for improving procedures, communication, decision-making processes and so on, based on what was done or omitted that might have led to failure to prevent the perpetrator killing his victim (Richards, 2003; Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate, 2016; Sharp-Jeffs and Kelly, 2016; Dawson, 2017).

Practitioners, with the help of researchers, first developed domestic fatality review teams approximately twenty years ago, as a new way to enhance understanding of the complex processes leading to homicide in intimate partner relationship. Fatality reviews in the US and Canada were created to address homicides with a special focus on intimate partner femicide (IPF) also in order to understand what could have been done to prevent the killing and to develop intervention or prevention strategies (see, for example, Watt, 2008). The outcomes of these reviews are directed towards policy recommendations, promotion of training, increasing awareness and modification of existing procedures. In 2011 and 2014, the UK also set up domestic homicide reviews (DHR), which addressed homicides within the family context (see Durfee et al, 2002; Rimsza et al, 2002; Webster et al, 2003; Dawson, 2017).

In order for fatality review teams to fulfil their remit, they need to be authorized by the legislature or established under executive orders to ensure they have the power to act with confidentiality, accountability and immunity (see also Dale et al, 2017). Specific legislations are needed to allow the fatality teams to gain access

to confidential information related to possible witnesses or family members, and to interview them in order to review the homicide and gather as much information as possible looking at the circumstances and characteristics around the death. Legislations and related executive orders are also formulated to allow leeway for local discretion regarding the convening agency and the membership of the team (Websdale et al, 2001).

Not all teams and all reviews follow the same procedure (cf. Dawson, 2017). Members of the fatality review team meet on a regular basis to review cases of IPF and develop recommendations for changes to policies and practices on the basis of their findings (Websdale, 1999; Websdale et al, 2001; Watt, 2008; Sharp-Jeffs and Kelly, 2016). The team can consist of as many representatives as possible from different sectors and institutions that might have played a role in the lives of both victim and perpetrator. It is up to the team members to decide whom to hear from and what type of research to undertake. The fatality review team may also share information they come across with relevant agencies, in addition to providing recommendations to them (Websdale, 1999; Websdale et al, 2001; Dawson, 2017).

The main aim of most fatality review teams is to prevent future fatalities through instigating changes at the system level, thereby involving different actors (Websdale, 1999). As Watt explains:

> These review teams model values, honesty and accountability and seek to identify breakdowns or gaps in service delivery, focusing less on individual accountability and more on system-wide coordination (Websdale et al, 1999). As opposed to placing blame on agencies for IPF (Intimate Partner Homicide), any errors committed in the risk assessment, in the procedure adopted before the killing… are viewed as inevitable aspects of coordinated delivery of complex services and perpetrators are ultimately held responsible for the deaths of their victims. (Watt, 2008: 57–9)

Addressing each single femicide case, looking at what happened; identifying the possible characteristics of the case at the individual, interpersonal, and social and community levels; and adopting an ecological approach can be of use to prevent other instances of femicide.

Each team reviews its case by adopting different methods, depending on the availability of resources, the commitment of different agencies, the experience of members and the number of femicides to analyse. Some teams, such as those examining cases of IPF, review any killings perpetrated by a current or former (female or male) intimate partner. Other teams review all deaths that occurred in the context of domestic violence (including suicides of perpetrators, as well as homicides of children, new intimate partners, intervening parties or responding law enforcement officers) (Dawson, 2017). Teams are organized in such a manner that they either review closed cases – in which the perpetrator has already been convicted – or open cases – where the case is still pending (Websdale, 1999; Websdale et al, 2001). The former method is much more common because law enforcement and the judicial system do not always favour sharing information that might compromise a conviction (Watt, 2008), although this varies from country to country. The information amassed by domestic violence fatality review teams is collected via several sources of information, including police records, coroners' files, autopsy reports, court documents, medical records, mental health records, social service reports, newspaper accounts and victim services records. In some cases, family members, friends or professionals are also interviewed (Watt, 2008; Dawson, 2017).

An advantage of fatality reviews in cases of femicide is that at the end of the review the team prepares a report indicating the method adopted, the sources of information used and the outcome of the review. It also provides recommendations for the improvement of service delivery, and these are also published online (see, for example, Dawson, 2017). The femicide review

might also be tasked with implementing and evaluating changes to service delivery and assessing their efficacy in their respective agencies, based on the recommendations they put forward, though the review will not always follow up on the implementation of these changes (Websdale, 2003; Watt, 2008; Sharp-Jeffs and Kelly, 2016;).

It is important to note that the conclusions of fatality reviews are often grounded in examinations of several cases, rather than a single case. This enables the team to address best management strategies, based on different levels of risk. Such reviews also have the advantage of linking together all possible risk factors preceding the femicide, exploring the risk factors related to the perpetrator, the vulnerability factors of the victims, and any contextual and interpersonal variables and circumstances.

Results from reviews on intimate partner femicide cases, one of the most frequent forms of femicide in Western countries, have demonstrated some emergent recurrent patterns that may be classified according to different risk factors and positioned at different levels, related to the perpetrator, the victim and the community. For this reason, when referring to prevention of femicide, another important aspect to take into consideration is risk assessment.

Risk assessment

Femicide risk assessment is a procedure targeted at prevention (Hart, 2008). It is based on the principle that some femicide cases can be prevented because some of these murders are preceded by an escalation of violence, threats and other lethal risk factors. Risk assessment allows us to identify the presence of risk and vulnerability factors, and to establish their nature and relevance to the violence. An assessment of the dynamic interaction of these risk factors renders it possible to improve understanding of the level of potential risk; this then opens up the choice of options for the most effective management strategies. By

adopting an ecological approach (Heise, 1998), the different level of risk are addressed: individual, interpersonal, and social and community.

Risk assessment can be carried out using actuarial methods, whereby a list of risk factors is added together and the total is compared with a specific threshold number, above which the risk is considered to be high. These approaches are useful because the methodology allows for an 'objective' reference level, upon which decisions will be based (Campbell et al, 2003).

Other approaches, such as the professional structures procedures – for example, SARA (the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment) (Kropp and Hart, 2000; Baldry and Winkel 2008) – are based on the analysis of presence or absence of risk factors. These risk factors have been identified by reviewing cases and empirical practice as highly correlated to recidivism of violence, escalation of violence and even killing. Risk factors for recidivism of intimate partner violence are very similar to the risk factors for femicide. What Campbell and colleagues (2003) found in their study is that only a very few indicators can be considered as specific indicators of lethal violence. These are named as follows: attempted strangulation, threats with firearms, extreme severe violence and, most importantly, what the woman herself perceives as risk. Women, however, might underestimate the risk involved; in such cases, they may not be able to self-assess their own risk. Nonetheless, when a victim states that she 'fears he will kill her' (or her children or any other relative or friend), it is important to take these statements seriously.

Table 5.1: Risk factors for intimate partner femicide and recidivism of intimate partner violence (IPV)

Category	Risk factor
Perpetrator	
	Substance use problems[a]
	Criminal history[a]
	Previous IPV[a]
	Possession of firearms[a]
	Victim of child abuse/exposure to IPV[a]
	Mental health problems[a]
	Socially disadvantaged[a]
Victim	
	Socially disadvantaged and/or isolated[a]
	Previous IPV (same or other partner)[a]
	Mental health problems[a]
	Substance use[a]
Victim–perpetrator relationship	
	Relationship status (separated or still cohabiting)[b]
	IPV (same or previous relationship)[b]
	Stalking[b]
	Children from another relationship[b]
Community	
	Insufficient social support network[c]
	Insufficient community resources[c]
	Lack of coordination between community resources[c]
	Attitudes accepting of violence against women[c]
	Lenient legislations[c]
Lethality violence-related risk factors	
	Attempted strangulation
	Threat to kill with a firearm
	Extreme fear of being killed on the part of the victim

Source: Adapted from Dawson (2017) and Watt (2008).
Note: In italics, some 'specific' lethality risk factors.
Based on an ecological framework, risk factors in the table above are categorised as follows: [a] individual, [b] interpersonal, [c] community and social levels.

Primary prevention to challenge patriarchal culture

Following the overview on fatality reviews and risk assessment, this section focuses on other forms of prevention aimed at bringing about cultural and structural changes. As stated above, the prevention of femicide is a complex issue which may be approached in several ways. Literature on prevention, especially in the area of health studies, points to a holistic approach to prevention as an effective means of eradicating a problem. Some perspectives equate prevention with early intervention, that is to say, getting to the root of a problem before the problem emerges, and eliminating the conditions that facilitate its occurrence.

Until recently, authors identified three levels of prevention: primary – to prevent the problem before it occurs; secondary – targeting the problem at the early signs; and tertiary – targeting populations where the problem is located (Wolfe and Jaffe, 1999). Learning from other areas, such as health and crime prevention, authors have since extended the paradigm of prevention to two additional levels. Initially, there is a level of primordial prevention – creating a culture and life habits where the probability of occurrence of the problem would be residual; at the other end of the continuum is quaternary prevention – that is, the follow-up to tertiary prevention, which aims to assert the sustainability of the possible quality of life (Starfield et al, 2008).

Although there are diverse perspectives on femicide, several approaches focus on the pervasive patriarchal culture as the material and cultural basis for this crime. This view understands femicide as an extreme form of violence against women on the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1987, 1988), and violence against women as the utmost form of women's oppression in society (Hagemann-White, 1998). Taking femicide as a lethal form of patriarchal control over women's lives, the task of preventing femicide 'has certain parallels with the task undertaken by feminists working around violence against women in the 1970s' (Radford, 1992: 7). From this perspective, male violence is

explained as a form of male dominance based on an imbalance of power in relationships featured in patriarchal society (Radford, 1992).

Naming the problem may be considered as the first step towards primary and primordial prevention. As part of 'women's right to name our experience' (Radford, 1992: 3), the understanding of the problem in its social, political and cultural context (Meneghel et al, 2013) – that is, extending the atomic/incidental perspective that only stresses the individual behaviour and the incident – is crucial to social and cultural change in relation to femicide. Data on the incidence of femicide accounts for a prevailing culture where women are still considered, to some extent, to be 'expendable'. Feminist analyses of violence against women centre on the structure of relationships in terms of a male–dominated culture, power and gender. Feminist explanations of violence against women consider gendered social arrangements and power as central (Taylor and Jasinski, 2011: 342).

Although femicide in intimate partner relationships is the more prevalent form, there are other forms of femicidal violence constituting part of that societal culture where the lives of women appear to be of minor importance.

Femicide takes many different forms, for example:

- racist femicide (black women killed by white men);
- homophobic femicide, or lesbicide, (lesbians killed by heterosexual men);
- marital femicide (women killed by their husbands or ex-husbands);
- serial femicide;
- mass femicide (including the deliberate transmission of the HIV virus by rapists);
- situations where women are permitted to die as the result of misogynous attitudes or social practices (female genital mutilation, illegal botched abortion);

- female infanticide;
- unnecessary lethal surgery (hysterectomies and clitoridectomies).

A comprehensive understanding will permit the creation of social and cultural conditions with the capacity to shift the patriarchal paradigm. Some acts of killing of women, such as those against lesbian women, black women and prostitutes, are still deemed to be of lesser gravity under the provisions of various legal reforms on violence against women.

The ultimate goal of femicide prevention is the eradication of this crime. In addition to fatality reviews and risk assessment as secondary and tertiary prevention, it is necessary to address the pertaining social and cultural factors within a comprehensive approach to prevention. As Nation et al (2003) attest, comprehensive prevention includes providing an array of interventions to address the salient precursors of the target problem, and extending these to primordial and primary prevention. For comprehensive strategies, there are two dimensions to consider – multiple interventions in multiple settings addressing the problem behaviour (Nation et al, 2003).

It is imperative that any comprehensive approach to primary prevention highlights femicide as a heinous crime, regardless of the social, cultural, ethnic or sexual status of the victim. Feminist literature has pointed out that femicide is a cruel reality, beyond the killing of women in the context of intimate partners or ex- partners, including the murder of women in contexts of sexual violence by known or unknown perpetrators, as in the case of the Ciudad Juarez murders in Mexico (Toledo Vásquez, 2008). Homophobia and racism demand to be addressed in order to develop the concept of women as persons of value in their own right. Recognition of heteronormativity as an oppressive dimension of patriarchal society can also facilitate the understanding of specific forms of femicide, namely, homophobic femicide and lesbicide. At the same time, 'an

awareness of the complexities of racism, of the historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism, of the trap of appropriating black women's experiences to advance the political agendas of white feminism' (Radford, 1992: 8) forms part of a holistic programme to eradicate femicide (and violence against women). Racism is sometimes evident: visible either as exaggeration of the problem – perpetuating the stereotype of black men as more prone to violence than white men – or minimization of its importance – suggesting that violence is more acceptable in these communities. Authors such as Marcela Lagarde y de Los Ríos (2008, 2011) have stressed the avoidable nature of this hate crime, as an outcome of state neglect towards the human rights of women. Stressing the neglect of the state, Lagarde calls this crime *feminicidio*, a term that has been adopted within the penal codes of Mexico, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Brazil.

This is an important point, in the sense that preventing femicide begins with effective action by the statutory agencies charged with the protection of women's lives.

Naming the problem and building a legal framework can contribute to increasing public awareness, and to diminishing tolerance of violence against women and femicide. Public awareness is best enhanced when people are able to identify the discernible dimensions and root causes of the problem.

Many femicides or attempted femicides are chronicles of deaths foretold (García Marquez, 1981); hence, it is possible to identify a number of dimensions at the foundation of these fatalities. As Caputi and Russell (1979: 426) assert, 'ironically, the patriarchy's ideal domestic arrangement (heterosexual coupling) is the most potentially femicidal situation'. Misogyny and sexism not only motivate gender violence (lethal and nonlethal), but distort the interpretation of the crime, as is visible in media coverage and other cultural expressions – for instance, in films

(femicidal violence being the main theme of slasher films[1]), music, video games and so on.

Cultural factors of femicide are deeply embedded in society, cutting across class, ethnicity, religion or region of the globe. Male sexual proprietariness (Wilson and Daly, 1998) and a male sense that they are entitled to get what they want from women (Caputi and Russell, 1979) are among issues that should be targeted in prevention – challenging the cultural basis of femicide.

However, naming the problem, legal frameworks and public awareness raising are not sufficient to create the desired change. A comprehensive strategy to eradicate femicide also needs to focus on addressing gender inequality and improving the status of women.

Research has provided contradictory evidence concerning the comparison between the status of women and men and rates of femicide. Some authors have found higher female homicide rates where the status of women is more equal to that of men, while others have found that gender income inequality does not correlate with overall femicide rates (Taylor and Jasinski, 2011). Others still have shown that the educational status of women is not directly linked with prediction of femicide: some evidence shows that femicide increases when the woman's educational status is higher, whereas other research studies present data that indicates that the risk of femicide increases where the woman's educational status is lower (Taylor and Jasinski, 2011). Some authors have also brought evidence to the effect that the erosion of white male privilege can have lethal outcomes. Hence, in some countries, the advance of the status of women has actually been concomitant with an increase in lethal violence.

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[1] 'Slasher': a subgenre of horror film, typically involving a psychopathic killer stalking and murdering victims in a graphically violent manner, often with a bladed tool, such as a knife, machete, axe, scythe or chainsaw.

Taking these data into consideration, some perspectives might argue against a prevention strategy based on challenging patriarchal society and culture. Without disregarding these research studies, however, there must be an acknowledgement, when considering a society's culture within a wider, historical context, that the changes in women's social status are only of recent origin. Furthermore, the increase in the status of some women is not synonymous with the eradication of the prevailing social representations of women and women's bodies: it does not mean that the social construction of the sexual objectification of women has undergone change. These individual changes do not challenge male sexual proprietariness (Wilson and Daly, 1998), the sense of male property ownership of women and children, and the hegemonic sense of entitlement to use force and violence to maintain control of women's lives (Campbell, 1992; Campbell et al, 2007). Nor are some individual social positions sufficient in themselves to balance the sexual contract (Pateman, 1988) of patriarchal, capitalist, heterosexist and racist society.

Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are still reproduced today by various agencies, social actors and institutional settings. Some young men learn to objectify women sexually through socialization with their peers, as well as other ways of learning masculinity, such as watching pornography, engaging in gang activity or other violent practices. Male fraternity and some male cultures include practices and/or discourses that support the abuse of women. Recent research also shows the emergence of rape culture and pro-abuse male peer support groups in cyberspace (DeKeseredy, 2011).

Challenging the social reproduction of women's oppression and/or subalternization calls for primary prevention, entering deeply into the cultural basis as well as challenging the symbolic violence against women (Bourdieu, 1989; Magalhães and Lima-Cruz, 2014). Educational studies have shown that the processes of cultural change are slow, requiring long, holistic and systematic interventions.

Romantic love (Gius and Lalli, 2014), jealousy, passion (Correa, 1981) and male sexual proprietariness (Wilson and Daly, 1998) represent a number of the social constructions of the heritage of modernity as elements at the foundation of the sexual contract in patriarchal society (Pateman, 1988). These dimensions of the 'private' and 'intimate' sphere, as opposed to the 'power' and 'public' domain, are inbuilt to the social dichotomies developed through modernity. The ultimate goal of primary and primordial prevention of femicide is to denaturalize and deconstruct the 'normalization' of violence against women in all its forms, including femicide.

Developing research, activism and intervention

Besides fatality reviews, risk assessment, and primary and primordial prevention, it is crucial to develop research and activism as well as appropriate intervention strategies and measures to address the issue of femicide across all the pertinent contexts.

The essential goal of research in general is to provide an understanding of and tools to decrease incidence of a social problem. Despite decades of relative 'invisibility' (Radford and Russell, 1992), research on femicide has expanded in recent years (Carcedo and Sagot, 2000; Glass, 2004; Carcedo, 2010; Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010; Lagarde, 2010; Romeva, 2013; Meneghel and Portella, 2017). However, in order to generate in-depth understanding, further research is required. This needs not only to be of a quantitative nature, but to incorporate a more holistic perspective. Some authors also stress the crucial relevance of disaggregating data accordingly, that is, in relation to ethnicity, 'race', marital status and age. Significantly, qualitative, in-depth research would have the potential to illuminate the complex, interwoven processes between human lives, as well as structural power relations and patterns of social change; this would allow opinion makers and policy makers to extend the vision of the

problem to its sociostructural factors (Grana, 2001). Logically, this should also pave the way for improved legislation, social policies and educational programmes. While the victims of femicide cannot be heard, we are still able to listen to the victims of attempted femicides and study the impact of this crime on family, children, relatives and wider society. Research can also trace the changes in media portraits of femicide (Magalhães-Dias and Lobo, 2016), allowing policy recommendations on news production.

To date, we still lack a clear understanding of the connections between gender inequality and lethal violence against women. Hence, further research into the relationship between this form of violence and the changes in gender relations over time is essential in order to plan more effective femicide prevention.

Research also informs feminist activism (Rosa and Magalhães, 2016) and intervention.[2] One outstanding example is the naming of the Brazilian Law 11.340/2006 to prevent and combat violence against women as the 'Maria da Penha Law', in tribute to the surviving victim of an attempted murder – a woman who is fortunately still alive and fighting for the recognition of this crime as a violation of human rights.

Conclusions

This chapter has suggested six main areas for the prevention of femicide:

1. The establishment of a state obligation to ensure the human rights of women (Toledo Vásquez, 2008), including the

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[2] For example, the authors of this chapter collaborated with the following groups and programmes, to whom they are indebted: the Combahee River Collective in Boston (a black feminist lesbian organization, 1974–80), the Repeal Attacks' and 'Murders of Women' groups in Britain, as well as symbolic initiatives.

enactment of appropriate legal measures to combat the murder of women in all situations, regardless of the women's social, economic, ethnic, marital or sexual status;

2. The acknowledgement of the gendered nature of this hate crime;
3. The treatment of femicide as a severe violation of human rights;
4. The development of more efficient and effective fatality reviews and risk assessments;
5. The creation of holistic, comprehensive and systematic educational programmes challenging patriarchal culture and contributing to a woman-friendly culture;
6. The development of quantitative and qualitative research to develop a better understanding of the problem.

These six preventive strategies do not cover all contingencies, insofar as femicide is embedded in the social construction of societal divisions between private and public life, and those between women and men. Nevertheless, taken together, they have the potential to make an impact and a valuable contribution to a progressive decrease in this horrific crime.

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